

**“Grateful Hearts”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

October 10, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – October 10, 2021**

“All Things Bright and Beautiful” #435 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 2, 4

*Chorus*

All things bright and beautiful  
All creatures great and small  
All things wise and wonderful  
The Lord God made them all

**V. 1** Each little flower that opens  
Each little bird that sings  
He made their glowing colours  
He made their tiny wings

*Chorus*

**V. 2** The cold wind in the winter  
The pleasant summer sun  
The ripe fruits in the garden  
He made them every one

*Chorus*

**V. 4** He gave us eyes to see them  
And lips that we might tell  
How great is God Almighty  
Who has made all things well

*Chorus*

*Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander / William Henry Monk*

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“For the Beauty of the Earth” #434 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 3, 5

(Verse 5 edited for consistency with the Book of Praise)

**V. 1** For the beauty of the earth  
For the glory of the skies  
For the love which from our birth  
Over and around us lies

*Chorus*

Lord of all to Thee we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise

**V. 3** For the joy of ear and eye  
For the heart and mind's delight  
For the mystic harmony  
Linking sense to sound and sight

*Chorus*

**V. 5** For each perfect gift of thine  
To the earth so freely given  
Graces human and divine  
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven

*Chorus*

*Conrad Kocher | Folliott Sandford Pierpoint*

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“Seek ye First” #625 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1-3

**V. 1** Seek ye first the kingdom of God  
And His righteousness  
And all these things  
Shall be added unto you  
Allelu alleluia

**V. 2** Ask and it shall be given unto you  
Seek and ye shall find  
Knock and the door  
Shall be opened unto you  
Allelu alleluia

**V. 3** We shall not live by bread alone  
But by ev'ry word  
That proceeds  
From the mouth of God  
Allelu alleluia

*Karen Lafferty*

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Closing Chorus: "Let There be Peace on Earth"

**V. 1** Let there be peace on earth  
And let it begin with me  
Let there be peace on earth  
The peace that was meant to be  
With God as our Father  
Brothers all are we  
Let me walk with my brother  
In perfect harmony

**V. 2** Let peace begin with me  
Let this be the moment now  
With ev'ry step I take  
Let this be my solemn vow  
To take each moment  
And live each moment  
In peace eternally  
Let there be peace on earth  
And let it begin with me

*Jill Jackson / Sy Miller*  
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**Scripture Texts: 1 Timothy 2:1-7**

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup> This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God;

there is also one mediator between God and humankind,  
Christ Jesus, himself human,

<sup>6</sup> who gave himself a ransom for all  
—this was attested at the right time. <sup>7</sup> For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

**Matthew 6:25-33**

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing?"

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,<sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.<sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’<sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.<sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

### **Meditation**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“I am so sick of talking about Covid and vaccines!” How often have you either said or heard someone else say these or similar words? I hear it a lot. I’ve said it. It’s been going on for long enough that most of us are tired of it. Now, I must say this does not give us license to slack off on protocols, stop paying attention to public health, or pay less attention to our behaviour for the sake of stopping the virus from spreading to more people. We still must mask, wash our hands, keep appropriate distances, and be vaccinated. As hard as it is, when we leave the sanctuary after worship we really must keep moving and have our conversations outside rather than in the narthex where it gets congested and it is next to impossible to keep that important distance between people. It goes against our natural inclinations to do some of these things, but for the sake of others, and ourselves, we must still pay attention to them until public health says otherwise. So much for being tired of talking about Covid.

It is easy to become frustrated and tired of things that we did not plan for. I wasn’t trained for ministry during a pandemic. Students didn’t plan for learning online. Teachers, for the most part, were not trained to teach in a virtual classroom. And that’s just pandemic frustration. What about an unexpected diagnosis? The sudden loss of a spouse or a child? Job loss? An accident? When life is disrupted by the things we don’t expect, it’s not hard to become grumpy, depressed, and cynical. Was I prepared to lose my singing voice after an illness a few years ago? No. Was I sad about it when I realized I couldn’t sustain it anymore? Yes. I would even say I was rather grumpy about the whole thing because I love to sing. I can still sing, but not like I used to. But after a while I realized I had a choice to make: stay grumpy and sad, or adapt and find a way to enjoy music again. There are days I get annoyed when I can’t make it through a whole song in my car – after all there are new ABBA songs to sing along with! But for the most part, I have found ways to enjoy music that don’t strain my vocal chords. I’m thankful for that. And you know what? I’m much more content when I am thankful than when I am grumpy and bitter about things I quite simply cannot control. Sometimes I have to make a conscious choice to rise above the things I don’t like.

This is Thanksgiving weekend in Canada, and we are encouraged to express the things for which we feel gratitude. We have much to be thankful for, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t

things we wish we could change. It doesn't change how we feel about the things that hurt, or don't go our way. Sometimes it's tough to rise above.

The Moderator of the 2021 General Assembly, the Rev. Dan Scott, posted an article on giving thanks on the PCC website this week. He reflects on a couple of situations he has experienced recently that really spoke to him and his sense of gratitude. Here is one of the experiences he shared:

“[An event] that reminded me of the importance of giving thanks was a ceremony in Bradford West Gwillimbury, Ontario, for the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation (Orange Shirt Day). An Indigenous Elder named White Eagle, whose mother was a Residential School Survivor, led us in a series of activities and reflections. When a bird flew by in full voice, White Eagle invited us to listen to the song of the raven. When a bee flew around his chair and drum, he urged us to hear the message of the bee saying to us, “just be...just be thankful.”

White Eagle urged us to say “thank you” using the Indigenous word *Meegwetch*. And he encouraged us to say *Meegwetch* to the Creator, the earth and sky, the elders and newborns, our town councillors, and our community.

For what do we have to be thankful for during the fourth wave of the pandemic?

Here is a partial list:

1. For health and strength and daily food.
2. For a public health-care system that doesn't always get it right but is working hard to ensure we are all safe.
3. For scientific research that has developed vaccines.
4. For the love of families, friends and congregations.
5. For God's protection, care and presence.

Perhaps, like me, you have had incidents that have encouraged you to be thankful even in the midst of these difficult days.”

As I read this reflection I found White Eagle's perspective to be quite powerful. This is a person whose mother survived a residential school, and whose life has been shadowed by the legacy of that experience. And yet, he was able to lead others to be thankful for something they may otherwise have seen as disruptive. I am thankful Dan shared that experience with us in his reflections, for it is a strong reminder that our mindset can make all the difference in how we can find ways to be thankful when we might otherwise be grumpy. And trust me, I need that reminder from time to time.

Last week we heard a beautiful note of thanks from someone who is suffering, and yet able to be grateful for what he has experienced and what God has revealed to him throughout his fight with cancer. He has found comfort in something he didn't expect, even as he suffers through something he didn't expect. There has been a wonderful response to that note. People were moved by it, touched by its message. And it has inspired further gratitude to be expressed by others.

Today I have been asked to share another note of gratitude, from another loved member of this church family, even though he no longer lives and worships among us. Johnnie moved

from Belleville to be closer to his family a few years ago, but still considers St. Columba to be his family. He heard Sherman's note last week as he watched the online service, and was moved to send his own words to us today. Here are those words:

"I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the love, care and support you have shared with me since my cancer diagnosis. Your cards have made me feel connected with you and treasured. The quilt I received from the Quilts for Cancer group is so beautiful (it reminds me of Kay's beautiful flower gardens, and the poppies make me think of all those that have served our country), and I know that the people that made it filled it with their love and prayers. I know that you have all been praying for me. Know that I think of you all as my family in Christ and I value and love you all. Praying for you all in this thanksgiving month. John."

At the meeting of the St. Columba Session in the past week, it was noted that there is a strong theme of *community* running through everything that is going on, and the responses we are receiving to worship services and pastoral care. I am so thankful to see this, and to know that others see it too. As we talked about Covid protocols, mission opportunities and ways to care for and connect with the congregation, I was touched by the level of compassion and concern I heard being expressed. There is a genuine concern for others as we strive to keep people safe, to let people know they are loved, and to connect with the community around us. As I asked for thoughts about a couple of items, that concern and compassion shone through the discussions. I am deeply thankful for these Elders who serve in this vital leadership role. They are an extraordinary group of leaders, serving in an extraordinary time.

I am deeply thankful for this particular time in the ministry and mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It's not an easy time, but it is a time filled with possibility and potential. It is a time when many colleagues throughout the nation are coming together in support and care for each other. It is a time when, as much as there is disagreement about doctrine, many people are actively calling and working for unity within the church with a remarkable level of commitment. It is a time within this Presbytery when we are talking about coming together in ways we have not done before that will strengthen the life and witness of the church in this region. No, it's not an easy time in the church because it seems everything is changing, but it's an exciting time to be open to the leading of the Spirit as we move forward together.

Oddly enough, even though I began this sermon with how tired we all are of the pandemic, I am deeply thankful for some of the things that have emerged because of it. A wave of compassion has swept over the world. Changes we have talked about for a long time but not known how to enact have come about because we have been forced to do things differently – especially in the church. I have learned so much about different ways to connect with people through technology, and how much it has made an impact on people. I have also learned things about myself that I didn't necessarily recognize before. I am grateful for the sense of community around me and the people I love, and for the recognition of its importance in a way we have mostly taken for granted.

I could go on about my gratitude for my husband and sons, my dad and extended family, my in-laws, my ministry, friends, neighbours... I think you get the point. I don't want to keep us here until next Tuesday, so I will close with one final word of gratitude.

I am deeply thankful for this congregation. I am at home with you. I feel loved by you, and I love you right back. I am shown grace when I mess up, and I am allowed to be my imperfect self without feeling like I've let you down. I am thankful that you allow each other to be imperfect and we can worship together and care for one another with all of our very human flaws. I cherish this church family, and I give thanks to God for you – your laughter, your tears, your prayers and your faith.

I hope that this weekend, as you focus on those things for which you are grateful, you will be able to give thanks in new and surprising ways. What are you truly thankful for? Is there something for which you are surprised by your gratitude? The apostle writes, *I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone... I urge you to do that this weekend, and every day. Being thankful will lead to more contentment in your heart, and being content requires much less energy than being grumpy. I speak from experience here. So please, seek contentment through gratitude, especially in those areas you may find challenging, like the pandemic. Once you get started, it will be easier to form the habit, and then you can give thanks for living a life of gratitude! Amen.*